

# Cedar Creek And Belle Grove National Historical Park: An Emerging New Park

MIDDLETOWN, VA.—Students of the American Civil War are likely unfamiliar with “Cedar Creek and Belle Grove” unless the Shenandoah Valley campaigns came to their attention. When you are ready to explore this fascinating region, and learn of its significant strategic value to both North and South, there’s now a new National Park to help you discover its rich history. Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park interprets all war-related action throughout the Valley, but is physically located onsite where the final climatic struggle occurred — The Battle of Cedar Creek.

Civil War enthusiasts who have attended one of many Civil War reenactments or visited the historic Belle Grove mansion in the past may think they have “been there, done that” - they should think again. The National Park Service is making its mark in this ‘partnership park.’ Exciting new programming, interpretive media and new facilities enhance the telling of this region’s American history so worthy of preservation and interpretation.

The Shenandoah Valley offered both armies natural avenues of invasion, and its rich agricultural bounty made it the “Breadbasket of the Confederacy.” “Stonewall” Jackson fended off several Union armies for control of the Valley in 1862. Confederate forces trekked through the Valley on route to Gettysburg and back in 1863. By 1864, General Jubal Early had been tasked by Gen. Lee to keep pressure on Washington and control Valley resources. Finally, in August 1864, President Lincoln and Gen. U.S. Grant sent Gen. Phil Sheridan’s army to take control once and for all. Civil War enthusiasts need to know the final climatic battle, The Battle of Cedar Creek, on Oct. 19, 1864, began as an overwhelming Confederate pre-dawn surprise attack, but ended as a decisive Union victory that helped ensure President Lincoln’s re-election. More than 8,600 soldiers on both sides were killed, wounded or captured. A re-enactment of the battle brings thousands of visitors to the Shenandoah Valley each fall, but thousands of additional visitors soak up great new park

visitation experiences all year long – and with good reason.

Ranger-conducted programs address the park’s and the Valley’s rich cultural history, from the Valley’s creation, through and beyond the Civil War. Offerings within park boundaries include multiple 30-minute “Cedar Creek and Belle Grove in a Box” overview briefs and walking tours or in-depth, 2-hour presentations on any number of topics relating to the battlefield, park interpretive sites or monuments. Whether looking for a chronological overview or in-depth study on details such as the Confederate Army’s all-night march and shocking surprise attack, a courageous stand by the Union’s 8th Vermont Regiment (while suffering 66 percent casualties) or the vital role of cavalry operations during General Sheridan’s bold counter attack, you’ll find programs suitable for all ages and interests.

Interpretive programming outside park boundaries occasionally places rangers and visitors in such communities as Winchester, Kernstown, Berryville, McDowell, Front

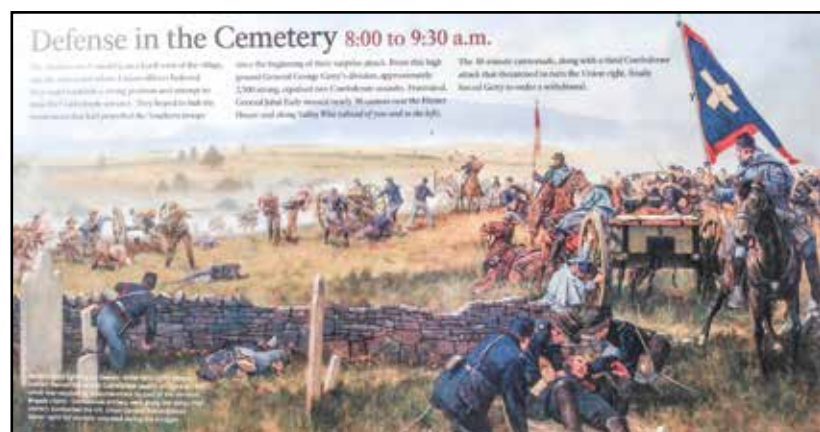
Royal, Cross Keys and Port Republic. Interpretive programs can encompass any aspect of the war’s physical, economic and emotional impact on Valley people – black or white, military or civilian. The park’s official motto, “From Backcountry to Breadbasket to Battlefield and Beyond”, describes the entire scope of interpretive opportunities.

Start at the Visitors Contact Station (A Mini-Visitor Center)

Begin your visit at the park’s Visitor Contact Station where you can plan your day and take in the 12-minute audio/visual overview of the battle of Cedar

Creek, with troop movements depicted on a three-dimensional fiber-optic electronic map. Other impressive exhibits offer insight into Shenandoah Valley people and resources before, during and after the Civil War. A “Faces of the Valley” exhibit depicts photos and narratives about soldiers and civilians whose lives were forever altered or cut short by war. A friendly volunteer or ranger will help guide you through available program options of the day and recommend activities most suited to your schedule and interests.

Although it may seem odd, the Contact Station is located in a strip mall along with commercial shops



Cemetery Hill sign (photo of new wayside sign, with Keith Rocco painting, to be installed later this year)



The sun rises over ground where the Army of the Shenandoah’s left flank (Thoburn’s division) faced Kershaw’s command on Cedar Creek battlefield. (NPS Photo-Buddy Secor)



Ranger Jeff Driscoll makes a point while on tour of a newly completed ‘Morning Attack’ trail where Union camps were overrun by a pre-dawn Confederate attack. (NPS Photo)

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Exhibits and displays at the Visitor Contact Station, such as the fiber optic map on the Battle of Cedar Creek, help orientate visitors to the history of the Valley. (NPS Photo-Ann and Rob Simpson)

at the north end of Middletown. Look for the brown National Park Service sign “Arrowhead” on the “Middletown Courts Shopping Center” sign at 7712 Main Street. A park service ‘sandwich board’ OPEN sign sits on the curb directly in front of the building. Don’t overlook it or give up... it’s your vitally important FIRST STOP.

What’s New to See and Do!

**Ranger Programs**

Participation in one or more ranger-led programs or guided tours will greatly enhance your visit.

Special ranger programs run from May through October.

Just a few examples of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP’s scheduled spring and early summer 2017 programs and activities include:



This ‘History at Sunset’ ranger tour on core battlefield land not only describes the battle but also its impact on civilians living in Heater House. (NPS Photo)

“On This Day” Programs

- May 7 – Battle of McDowell Tour: A car caravan tour commemorates the 155th anniversary of this important clash, the first of “Stonewall” Jackson’s victories in the 1862 Valley Campaign. Join Ranger Jeff Driscoll at the Highland County Museum, 161 Mansion House Road, McDowell, Va.
- June 9-10 Cross Keys/Port Republic 155th Anniversary Events: Commemorative events include National Park Service ranger-led car caravan tours and programs, living history, kids’ activities, torchlight tours and more. All activities are co-sponsored by the National Park Service, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, Port Republic Museum and the Town of Port Republic.

History at Sunset Series

- June 2 – Enslaved to Freed - Clermont Farm/Josephine City: This ranger program explores how newly freed African Americans created post-Civil War communities like Josephine City in Clarke County, Virginia. A ranger-led car caravan from Clermont Farm to Josephine City looks at 16 black families (93 individuals) who built homes and thrived here after emancipation.
- June 30 – Belle Grove Enslaved Cemetery: Ranger Shannon Moeck describes the challenges of identifying and preserving these sacred spaces. Learn how technologies can be utilized to identify the burial practices and rituals of the Virginia enslaved and perhaps even reveal the identities of those buried here.

Battlefield Series

- May 20 – Running Fight down the Valley Pike: This special program examines the 155th anniversary of Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks’ Union retreat down the Valley Pike towards Winchester. The NPS ranger-led car caravan tour follows in the footsteps of Banks’ men who attempted to escape the converging forces of Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson following their attack on Front Royal.
- June 17 – Sabers & Saddles: Cavalry at Cedar Creek: This program will highlight the role of both Union and Confederate cavalry at Cedar Creek. The NPS ranger-led car-caravan tour will take visitors to parts of the park rarely seen; providing an opportunity to explore the crucial role the mounted arm played in the battle.

All scheduled programs and activities within the park and the Shenandoah Valley are outlined at [www.nps.gov/cebe](http://www.nps.gov/cebe).

Professional tour groups, large or small, can arrange customized ranger-led tours for any or all Shenandoah Valley battlefields, personalized to meet group interest and needs. Advanced notice is required and service is available as staffing permits. Contact [eric\\_campbell@nps.gov](mailto:eric_campbell@nps.gov) for additional information.

Cedar Creek Self-Guided Driving Tour

Armed with a reference guide, park map and accompanying CD, set out on your own to drive this 18-mile, 10-stop battlefield tour at your own pace. Stop along the way to take photos and listen to a narrative description of historic events as the battle story unfolds. Your reference guide provides

detailed driving directions and a brief written summary of events as they occurred at each respective location. New National Park Service wayside signage is scheduled to be installed by the fall of 2017.

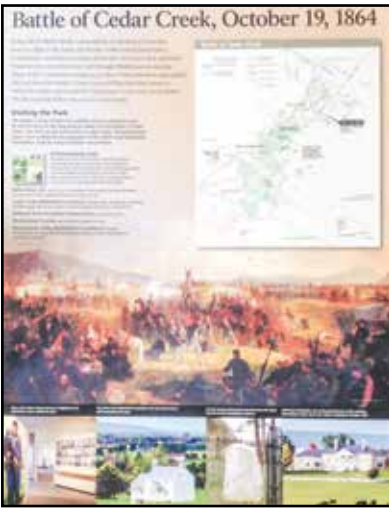
Morning Attack Trails

- Here’s your chance to “Walk the field of battle.” Three trails let you explore critical phases of the early morning fight and can be hiked individually or in various combinations.
- The 8th Vermont Monument Trail retraces Col. Stephen Thomas’s Brigade’s desperate rush into the heat of battle and a bitter “Fight for the flags.”
  - The Thomas Brigade Loop Trail outlines various positions of the 160th New York, 12th Connecticut and 47th Pennsylvania Infantry regiments; continues through VIII Corps camp locations and on to where portions of the “Stonewall Brigade” and nine other Virginia regiments launched their surprise attack.
  - The Hayes-Ramseur Loop Trail takes you to where Col. Rutherford B. Hayes and Col. J. Howard Kitching’s troops were overrun by Maj. Gen. Stephen Dodson Ramseur’s Division, ultimately leading to the final collapse of the entire VIII Corps.
- Each trail is well marked and is accompanied by a full-color eight-page trail guide.

A Wonderful Small Park Experience

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP visitors routinely express delight at the rich heritage and colorful history discovered here and throughout the Valley... thanks to superb park rangers, interpretive programs and greatly enhanced park facilities.

Whether spending an hour, a day, or week in the Shenandoah Valley, this destination is one “must see, must do” for



New interpretive signage significantly improves the visitor experience at this emerging park. (NPS Photo)

Civil War history buffs. The intrigue, captivating stories and battlefield experience — “From Backcountry to Breadbasket to Battlefield and Beyond” — cannot be told at Gettysburg, Antietam or Fredericksburg... it can only be enjoyed at Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park.

About Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park: Created on December 19, 2002, Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park encompasses approximately 3,700 acres across three counties and includes the key partner sites of Belle Grove Plantation (owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and managed by Belle Grove, Inc.), Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, and a developing Shenandoah County Park. The partner sites continue to be owned and operated independently.

The park commemorates a nationally significant Civil War landscape and antebellum plantation by sharing the story of Shenandoah Valley history from early settlement through the Civil War and beyond. The park is also located within the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District, a National Heritage Area.



Battlefield tours often “walk in the footsteps” of the soldiers themselves. This group, led by ranger Jeff Driscoll, is following two Union regiments at Cedar Creek. Each visitor also is assigned the name of an individual soldier and learns of their fate at the end of the program. (NPS Photo)